

# **Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 2 (Gen 15:1-17:27)**

## **Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 2 (Gen 15:1-17:27), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture** on Genesis 15:1-17:27 focuses on the covenant between God and Abraham, exploring the birth of Ishmael through Abraham's union with Hagar and its implications. The lecture **analyzes the covenant ceremony** in Genesis 15 and then **examines the covenant sign of circumcision** in Genesis 17, emphasizing the developing relationship between God and Abraham. **Key themes** include God's mercy, the importance of covenant, and the changing identities of Abraham and Sarah reflected in their name changes. Finally, the lecture **sets the stage for the discussion** of Sodom and Gomorrah in the following session.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 13 – Double click icon to play  
in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org  
[BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old  
Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).**



**Mathews\_Genesis\_  
Session13.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 2 (Gen. 15:1-17:27)

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis 15-17, focusing on the covenant ceremony, the birth of Ishmael, and the covenant sign of circumcision:

#### **Briefing Document: Genesis 15-17 - Covenant, Ishmael, & Circumcision**

**Overall Theme:** This session explores the unfolding of God's covenant with Abraham, highlighting the tension between human attempts to fulfill the promise and God's sovereign plan. It analyzes the birth of Ishmael as a consequence of doubt and the establishment of circumcision as the sign of the covenant. The lecture emphasizes the development of the relationship between God and Abraham.

#### **Key Points & Ideas:**

##### **1. Context & Continuity:**

- This session is a continuation from the previous one, further examining Genesis 15-17.
- It has been 10 years since Abraham and Sarah entered Canaan.
- The lecture emphasizes the connection between Chapters 15 (covenant ceremony) and 17 (covenant sign) as aspects of the same covenant, despite some scholars suggesting they are different covenants.
- Dr. Mathews points out the "I am" statements in both chapters (15:1,7 and 17:1) as evidence for continuity.
- A key idea is that God is progressively revealing himself and his plan to Abraham, strengthening their relationship.

##### **1. The Birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16):**

- **Human Intervention:** Driven by Sarah's barrenness and their aging, Abraham and Sarah devise a plan to have a child through Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maidservant. This is presented as a desperate move, reflecting doubt in God's promise.
- **Surrogate Mother Custom:** The adoption of a child through a surrogate mother was an acceptable practice at the time, and is why Abraham agreed to Sarah's plan.

- **Echoes of the Fall:** Mathews draws a parallel between Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham and Eve giving the fruit to Adam in Genesis 3. He says, "This may be an intentional reflection of what occurred in the garden. And so, the human condition continues. In a troublesome doubting of God's Word".
- **Rivalry & Conflict:** Hagar's pregnancy leads to conflict between Hagar and Sarah, reflecting the societal pressure on women to bear children. Sarah says to Abraham, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering."
- **God's Mercy:** Despite the circumstances, God's mercy is evident. An angel of the Lord finds Hagar and instructs her to return to Sarah.
- **Promise to Hagar:** God promises Hagar that her offspring will be numerous, mirroring the promises made to Abraham, "I will so increase your numbers that they will be too numerous to count."
- **Name Ishmael:** The name "Ishmael" means "God hears," signifying God's attentiveness to Hagar's suffering and God's provision, "For the Lord has heard of your misery."
- **Ishmael's Character:** Ishmael is described as "a wild donkey of a man" who will live in conflict and hostility, "His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him." This conflict is seen as being passed down through his descendants.
- **Hagar's Revelation:** Hagar names God "El Roi," meaning "the God who sees me," and the well is named Beer-lahai-roi, "the well of the living one who sees me." This highlights God's care for even those considered outsiders.

#### 1. The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17):

- **Confirmation by Sign:** Chapter 17 is presented as a continuation of the covenant in chapter 15, confirming it with the sign of circumcision.
- **God Almighty:** God reveals himself to Abraham as "El Shaddai," "God Almighty," underscoring his power and sovereignty.
- **Walk Before Me & Be Blameless:** God instructs Abraham to "walk before me and be blameless," emphasizing the need for a life of integrity and faithfulness, not earning righteousness.
- Mathews clarifies that blameless means a life that is complete or whole, dedicated to God's keeping.

- **Closer Relationship:** The session emphasizes a developing closer relationship between God and Abraham.
- **God's Desire to be Known:** God desires to make himself known and share his life with people, which is why he created and rescues his special people. This desire culminates in Christ in the New Testament.
- Mathews highlights God's devotion to rescuing and creating a people for himself, through Jesus. "So devoted and committed is the Lord God to creating for himself and rescuing special people for himself that he has chosen to come himself in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- **Name Changes:** Abram's name is changed to Abraham ("father of many") to signify a new identity and the fulfillment of God's promise, "I have made you... a father of many nations." Sarai's name is changed to Sarah ("princess").
- **Promise of Fruitfulness & Kings:** God promises to make Abraham "very fruitful," to make nations of him, and that kings will come from him.
- **Everlasting Covenant:** The covenant between God and Abraham is declared to be everlasting, extending to his descendants. The land of Canaan is promised as an everlasting possession.
- **Circumcision as a Sign:** Circumcision is established as the sign of the covenant, signifying the promise and commitment made in the male organ for reproduction and inheritance. This is not a hygienic or puberty rite, but rather a sign of the covenant.
- **Abraham's Response:** Abraham initially laughs at the prospect of having a child at his age, and expresses the wish for Ishmael to be blessed, rather than Sarah bearing a child.
- **God's Promise of Isaac:** God assures Abraham that Sarah will bear a son named Isaac ("he laughs," or "he will laugh"), who will be the son of promise.
- **Circumcision of Household:** Abraham and his whole household are circumcised as a demonstration of their commitment to the covenant, including Ishmael.
- **Ishmael's Blessing:** God also promises to bless Ishmael and give him many descendants, even though he is not the covenant child.

### 1. **Connecting to the New Testament:**

- Mathews points to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's desire to be known by his people, citing the fullness of the Godhead being found in Christ.
- He emphasizes Jesus's humanity and his sacrifice for humanity as evidence of God's love and his commitment to rescue his people.

### **Key Quotes:**

- "This may be an intentional reflection of what occurred in the garden. And so, the human condition continues. In a troublesome doubting of God's Word" (Regarding Hagar and Abraham's actions).
- "I will so increase your numbers that they will be too numerous to count." (Promise to Hagar about her offspring).
- "For the Lord has heard of your misery." (Explanation of the name Ishmael).
- "His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him." (Description of Ishmael's character).
- "You are the God who sees me" (Hagar calling God El Roi).
- "I have made you... a father of many nations." (God explaining the change of name from Abram to Abraham).
- "So devoted and committed is the Lord God to creating for himself and rescuing special people for himself that he has chosen to come himself in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Connecting the covenant to Jesus Christ).

### **Implications:**

- The passage illustrates the tension between human attempts to control God's plan and God's sovereign grace.
- It underscores God's mercy and provision even for those who are outside the main line of the covenant, like Hagar and Ishmael.
- The importance of faith and obedience is shown through Abraham's continued response to God.
- Circumcision is presented as a physical mark of commitment to the covenant with God.

- God's desire to have a relationship with humanity is shown, and his efforts to make himself known.

**Next Steps:** The lecture concludes by preparing for the discussion of Sodom and Gomorrah in the next session, highlighting how these events relate to the overarching themes of the covenant and God's justice and mercy.

## 4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 2 (Gen. 15:1-17:27)

### Genesis Chapters 15-17 Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the significance of Sarah's barrenness in the context of the covenant promises to Abraham?
2. Describe the circumstances that led to the birth of Ishmael.
3. How does the narrative of Hagar and Ishmael echo the events of the Garden of Eden?
4. What is the significance of the name "Ishmael" and how does it relate to Hagar's experience?
5. How does the angel of the Lord describe the character and future of Ishmael?
6. What is the significance of the change of names from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah?
7. Explain the meaning and importance of the covenant sign of circumcision.
8. What is the meaning of the name "Isaac," and what does it reveal about the circumstances of his birth?
9. How does God's blessing on Ishmael show His mercy and extend his plan to others than the direct line of the covenant?
10. What is the relationship between the covenant in Chapter 15 and the covenant in Chapter 17?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Sarah's barrenness creates a major obstacle to the fulfillment of God's promise of numerous descendants to Abraham, highlighting that this promise is fulfilled only by God's power and not by human efforts. It emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's covenant and its dependence on His faithfulness.

2. After ten years in Canaan with no child, Sarah proposes that Abraham have a child with her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. This plan was to obtain an heir through a surrogate, in line with certain ancient customs.
3. The narrative of Hagar and Ishmael echoes the Garden of Eden story by showing human initiative doubting God's plan. Sarah's action of offering Hagar to Abraham mirrors Eve's offering the fruit to Adam, leading to conflict and tension, and again putting God's promises in danger.
4. "Ishmael" means "God hears," reflecting God's attentiveness to Hagar's suffering and her desperate situation. The name underscores God's merciful intervention and provision for the outcast, even outside the primary covenant line.
5. The angel of the Lord describes Ishmael as a "wild donkey of a man," indicating he would be independent and live on the margins of society. He also prophesied Ishmael's descendants would be numerous and would be in conflict with those of Isaac.
6. The name change from Abram to Abraham, meaning "exalted father" to "father of many," signifies a shift in identity to highlight God's promise that Abraham will father nations. The change from Sarai to Sarah, meaning "my princess" to "princess," emphasizes her role in this promise as the mother of nations.
7. Circumcision serves as a physical sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. It is a permanent mark of their commitment to God, particularly connected with the promise of progeny, though it was not unique to Abraham's family.
8. Isaac means "he laughs," or "he will laugh," and it reflects both the doubt and disbelief of his parents upon hearing the promise of his birth, as well as the joy he brings. The name connects to God's power to fulfill His promise even amid the parents' age.
9. God's blessing on Ishmael emphasizes the wide scope of his mercy and blessing to even those outside the direct line of the covenant. This shows God's plan of blessing for all nations, not just Israel.
10. The covenant in chapter 15 establishes the promise of land and descendants with a ratification ceremony and God's self-identification. In chapter 17, this covenant is confirmed with the sign of circumcision and name changes and emphasis on an everlasting relationship with God.



## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Answer these questions in essay format, drawing from the provided source material.

1. Analyze the role of human doubt and initiative in Genesis 16 and how it contrasts with God's faithfulness in the context of the Abrahamic covenant.
2. Discuss the significance of the character of Ishmael, and how his story demonstrates both God's mercy and the consequences of not following God's perfect will.
3. Explain the ways in which the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 15-17 build upon one another, highlighting the progression of God's plan.
4. Compare and contrast the significance of the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 with the covenant sign of circumcision in Genesis 17.
5. How does the text emphasize that God is making himself known to Abraham through various means and how does it relate to the promise of the ultimate deliverer?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Covenant:** A sacred agreement or relationship, in this case between God and Abraham, involving promises and responsibilities.
- **Barrenness:** The inability to have children, a significant problem for women in ancient cultures, especially in the context of God's promises of numerous descendants.
- **Surrogate Mother:** A woman who bears a child on behalf of another, as with Hagar and Sarah's arrangement in ancient times.
- **El Shaddai:** A Hebrew name for God, translated as "God Almighty," emphasizing His power and sovereignty.
- **Ishmael:** Abraham's son with Hagar, whose name means "God hears," highlighting God's attention to the suffering of the marginalized.
- **Circumcision:** The removal of the foreskin of the penis, a physical sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his male descendants.
- **Isaac:** Abraham's son with Sarah, whose name means "he laughs," reflecting the initial doubt and then joy surrounding his birth.
- **El Roi:** A Hebrew name for God, meaning "the God who sees me," emphasizing God's awareness of individual suffering and experience.
- **Progeny:** Offspring; descendants.
- **Blameless:** Not meaning perfection, but rather a life of integrity, faithfulness, and godliness.

## 5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 2 (Gen. 15:1-17:27), [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Genesis 15-17

1. **Why did Abraham and Sarah pursue having a child through Hagar?**
2. After 10 years in Canaan without children, Sarah, who was barren, and Abraham, now 85 years old, sought an alternative to God's promise. Sarah proposed that Abraham have a child with her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, following a custom of adoption by a surrogate mother common in their time. This was a response to their desperation for an heir and a misinterpretation of God's promise of a son from Abraham's own body.
3. **How does the story of Hagar and Ishmael relate to the events in the Garden of Eden?**
4. The text draws parallels between Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham and Eve's giving the forbidden fruit to Adam. Both actions represent human initiative and doubt of God's word. The consequences are also similar, with rivalry and tension emerging, mirroring the struggles that followed the fall in the Garden of Eden. It illustrates a continuation of the human condition of choosing our way over God's.
5. **What does the name "Ishmael" signify, and how does it relate to God's character?**
6. "Ishmael" means "God hears," reflecting that God heard Hagar's misery as an Egyptian slave and intervened. This shows God's mercy and attentiveness to even those considered outsiders. It highlights that God is not only for the chosen people but also cares for the marginalized, showing his protection and provision extends to all.
7. **What is the significance of God's description of Ishmael as a "wild donkey of a man"?**
8. This phrase describes Ishmael's character as one who will live on the margins of society, in a hostile relationship with others. It foreshadows the future conflicts and rivalry between Ishmael's descendants and the descendants of Isaac, who is the promised son. It also suggests that while God's blessing extends to Ishmael, his path will be different from that of the covenant line.

**9. What is the central theme of Genesis 17 in relation to the earlier events in chapter 15?**

10. Chapter 17 is presented as a continuation and confirmation of the covenant established in chapter 15, despite some scholarly debate as to whether it is a separate covenant. Chapter 15 focuses on the covenant ceremony, while chapter 17 centers on the covenant sign of circumcision. Both are linked by the "I am" statement by God and emphasize a closer relationship developing between God and Abraham. The major theme is God wanting to be known and sharing His life with those who receive his word by faith.

**11. Why does God change Abram's and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah?**

12. The change in names signifies a new identity and purpose. Abram, meaning "exalted father," is changed to Abraham, "father of many nations." This change embodies the promise that God has made to Abraham and declares it is as good as done. Similarly, Sarai, which may have meant something like "my princess," is changed to Sarah, simply meaning "princess." This signifies that she will be the mother of nations and kings. It marks God's work and intervention to make these promises true.

**13. What does the sign of circumcision symbolize in the covenant between God and Abraham?**

14. Circumcision serves as a physical sign of the covenant and the commitment of Abraham and his descendants to God. It is a mark on the male organ, symbolizing the promise of offspring and the inheritance that comes through that lineage. The sign was not unique to Abraham, but in the context of God's covenant it was to establish belonging to God's promise and not simply a cultural rite.

**15. Why does Abraham laugh when God promises him a son through Sarah, and what is the significance of Isaac's name?**

16. Abraham's laughter reflects his doubt and disbelief because of his and Sarah's old age (99 and 89 years, respectively) when God promises a son. Isaac's name, which means "he laughs," directly references their laughter of disbelief. Yet, it also represents the great joy the promised child will bring to the aging family, and ultimately the fulfillment of God's promise. It shows how God will fulfill his promise even through human doubt.